

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **A VISION FOR THE MEADOWLANDS DISTRICT**

### **ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES**

This Master Plan creates an overall vision for the Meadowlands District through the delineation of cohesive goals, principles, standards, and strategies. The vision statement and the accompanying set of broad goals presented in this chapter provide a general framework for the plan. Together they serve as an expression of the purpose of the Meadowlands District and the role of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC).

The NJMC is charged with environmental protection and stewardship, promoting orderly development, and providing for the solid waste needs of the region. The 30.4 square-mile District is located approximately five miles west of New York City in northern New Jersey. The District encompasses portions of fourteen municipalities in two counties: Carlstadt, East Rutherford, Little Ferry, Lyndhurst, Moonachie, North Arlington, Ridgefield, Rutherford, South Hackensack, and Teterboro in Bergen County and Jersey City, Kearny, North Bergen, and Secaucus in Hudson County. The District is bordered by Route 46 on the north, Routes 1 and 9 (Tonnelles Avenue) and the freight rail line owned by Norfolk Southern and CSX Corp. (the former Conrail main line) on the east, the Port Authority Trans Hudson (PATH) commuter rail lines and Pulaski Skyway on the south, and Route 17, the Pascack Valley rail line, and the Kingsland rail line on the west. The District's geographic location is presented as Map 1 in the map section at the end of this document. Map 2 identifies the boundaries of the political jurisdictions within the District.

The Hackensack Meadowlands Reclamation and Development Act (N.J.S.A. 13:17-1 *et seq.*), effective January 13, 1969, recognized the meadowlands of the lower Hackensack River as “a land resource of incalculable opportunity for new jobs, homes and recreational sites.” The Act cited “their strategic location in the heart of a vast metropolitan area with urgent needs for more space for industrial, commercial, residential, and public recreational and other uses . . .” The objectives of the Act include:

- The preservation of the delicate balance of nature;
- The provision of special protection from air and water pollution and a special provision for solid waste disposal; and
- The orderly, comprehensive development of the Hackensack Meadowlands in order to provide more space for industrial, commercial, residential, public recreational, and other uses.

## **A Vision for the Meadowlands District**

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The Act also created the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission (HMDC) and authorized the preparation and adoption of a master plan for the physical development of the district. The HMDC was renamed the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission on August 27, 2001, to better reflect its role in the region as a State agency.

This Master Plan is the first major revision to the original Hackensack Meadowlands Comprehensive Land Use Plan of October 1970, although there have been a number of planning initiatives by the NJMC since that time. “Stage I” of the original Comprehensive Plan, published in November 1969, set the groundwork for the 1970 Land Use Plan by describing the following barriers to the Meadowlands realizing its potential:

- Difficult physical features;
- The complexity of devising a plan;
- The absence in the past of a sound governmental vehicle for carrying out the plan;
- The uncertainty of title and land holdings; and
- The environmental degradation of the area.

In fact, the environmental degradation and other issues necessitated bold and creative vision for the Meadowlands District. The original Comprehensive Plan rose to this challenge, as evidenced by the following passage describing the District of the future:

It will be a proving ground where New Jersey can attain the goals of a healthful environment, protection of wildlife and open space, sensible use of land, creation of balanced communities, economic growth, efficient disposal of waste materials, control over dangerous pollutants, rapid mobility of people and goods and imaginative use of modern design and technology.

The Comprehensive Plan brought order to the District with respect to designating an appropriate array of land uses, reversing environmental degradation, and managing landfill operations. It did so while striving to achieve a balance between the pressures for economic growth, recreational areas, and open space preservation. Parks and recreation areas were proposed for landfill sites. Conservation and wildlife reserve areas were proposed at various locations along the Hackensack River, particularly the Saw Mill Creek Wildlife Management Area in Lyndhurst and Kearny.

The Plan also identified several large tracts of lands as Special Use Areas where “regional facilities” would be encouraged as significant contributors to development. Among the suggested uses were sports facilities, cultural centers, and higher educational institutions. These Special Use Areas would incorporate creative design techniques and state-of-the-art technologies. The Meadowlands Sports Complex stands as the key example of this development genre.

Other major achievements of the original plan include the protection of fragile wetlands; the closing of landfills; the creation of recreational space; the Harmon Cove residential community in Secaucus; extensive warehousing and industrial development; and the Frank R. Lautenberg Station at Secaucus Junction. Secaucus Junction connects virtually all NJ Transit rail lines serving northern New Jersey, enabling commuters to transfer from the Main, Bergen, Port

Jervis and Pascack Valley Lines to all Northeast Corridor (NEC), North Jersey Coast Line, and MidTOWN DIRECT trains.

The Plan's overall vision continues to be valid today after the passage of more than three decades. Nevertheless, certain aspects must be reconsidered in light of current planning philosophies and legal mandates:

- The 1970 Plan was adopted prior to passage of significant federal and State legislation (e.g., Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act) and the births of the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

**FIGURE 1.1** *The area now designated Richard W. DeKorte Park was the focal point of the recreation component of the original Comprehensive Plan. A major stop along the Atlantic Flyway, the site was, historically, a tidally flowed mudflat. The site presents a literal barrier against the continued destruction of marshland by landfilling.*



**FIGURE 1.2** *Another major achievement of the original Plan, the Frank R. Lautenberg Station at Secaucus Junction. The station unifies 11 of NJ Transit's 12 rail lines. It also creates a foundation for the next generation of transportation improvements, including bi-level rail cars, expanded parking throughout the system, and the construction of new rail tunnels beneath the Hudson River. Source: Courtesy of New Jersey Transit*



## **A Vision for the Meadowlands District**

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- The original Plan called for over 2,000 acres of wetlands fill; the emphasis is now on redevelopment.
- New urban wildlife estuary and conservation areas are in critical need.
- The encouragement of mass transit and roadway system maintenance have replaced new construction as transportation priorities.
- Evolving economic conditions have created pressures for changes in land uses.
- Market and economic conditions require development of technologically “smart” office buildings and distribution facilities.
- Brownfield legislation and regulations provide development opportunities not available previously, alleviating pressure to develop on wetland sites.

### **VISION STATEMENT**

This Master Plan is an expression of the overall vision of a regreened Meadowlands and a revitalized urban landscape. It is also a commitment by the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, in exercising its authority under the Hackensack Meadowlands Reclamation and Development Act, to continue to serve as trustee of the natural resources of the Meadowlands District and to foster a sustainable regional economy. The Plan recognizes the Meadowlands as a large but fragile expanse of waterways, marshes, and meadows that are home to a wide variety of wildlife species, including several threatened or endangered species. The Plan also recognizes that the Meadowlands contains a cultural and economic landscape shaped by centuries of human habitation. Consequently, a comprehensive plan for the District must consider its environmental, economic, and societal needs, i.e., jobs and businesses, the natural surroundings, and the quality of life.

The overall vision of a regreened Meadowlands and a revitalized urban landscape will be achieved through:

- The protection, preservation, and enhancement of wetlands culminating in the preservation of 8,400 acres;
- The thoughtful balancing of planned redevelopment and new development on upland sites;
- An integrated multi-modal transportation network; and
- The retention and growth of commercial, industrial, and financial enterprises and jobs.

Redevelopment of underutilized or poorly utilized areas, some of which may include “brownfields,” is critical to the future of the District. New investment and selected redevelopment will be both orderly and environmentally compatible. New development will take into consideration the capacity of the transportation system, the availability of public services, and the impact on the natural environment. Although it is often difficult to balance the rights of individual property owners and the public benefit, there will be greater balance between needs for planned development and the environment. The District will meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To that end,

this Master Plan incorporates the themes of smart growth and a sustainable course of action by designating certain areas for economic growth, with other areas targeted for environmental enhancement and protection.

Smart growth provides a framework for making decisions about how and where to grow in the District. It reflects the rising national concern that “sprawl” or inefficient, greatly dispersed patterns of development, are not in the best interest of our cities, suburbs, towns, and rural and wilderness areas. Sprawl results when new development takes place in undeveloped areas, removed from existing infrastructure. It causes a loss of open space, farmland, and critical environmental areas. Environmental and fiscal concerns have spurred the smart growth movement.

**FIGURE 1.3** *An architectural rendering of a residential island cluster from the original Comprehensive Land Use Plan of 1970. The residential areas shown on the Land Use Plan would have resulted in the development of 70,000 residential units and a new population of approximately 185,000 for the Meadowlands District. In 2000, the District included a total of 4,649 residential units and a population of 10,635.*



**FIGURE 1.4** *Berry's Creek Center as envisioned by the original plan. The Center was intended to depict the charm of Venice's San Marco Plaza and serve as a focal point of the Meadowlands' changed identity. The site was recently purchased by the NJMC to be preserved as open space.*



## **A Vision for the Meadowlands District**

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In 1996, the US Environmental Protection Agency and several other government and non-profit agencies joined to form the Smart Growth Network (SGN). Network partners have pooled their experiences to identify the common denominators that contribute to smart growth successes. The resulting ten principles provide impetus to the development of action strategies in this Master Plan:

1. Mix land uses.
2. Take advantage of compact building design.
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
4. Create walkable neighborhoods.
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
7. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective.
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

The concept of sustainable development is also essential to the long-term vitality of the District. The term was brought into widespread use by the 1987 report, “Our Common Future,” released by the United Nations’ World Commission on Environment and Development. The report defined sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The key concept of the report is that our “economic future is linked to the integrity of natural systems.”

The President’s Council on Sustainable Development offers this nationally focused definition of sustainability: “A sustainable United States will have a growing economy that provides equitable opportunities for satisfying livelihoods and a safe, healthy, high quality of life for current & future generations.” The Council was established in June 1993 to develop “bold, new approaches to achieve our economic, environmental, and equity goals.” Its goals collectively express the understanding that economic prosperity, environmental protection, and social equity must be sought together.

One of New Jersey’s most comprehensive undertakings to achieve sustainable development is the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The initial State Plan was adopted in 1992; the current State Plan was adopted in March 2001. The new State Plan identifies a set of critical indicators and targets that relate to economic, environmental, infrastructure, community life and intergovernmental coordination areas. It includes 27 additional indicators that can be used for further monitoring. Although the State Plan does not include its jurisdiction, the NJMC seeks to develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the State Planning Commission regarding the shared goals of Smart Growth in accordance with current State initiatives.

The approach common to the United Nation’s World Council, the President’s Council, and the State Plan is the selection of core indicators to measure quality of life and sustainability. Using existing data, each entity adopted several indicators of economic vitality, as well as quality of life indicators in the social and environmental realms. Each set of indicators can be used to produce a statement regarding progress toward sustainability.



The Hackensack Meadowlands Reclamation and Redevelopment Act recognized that the District's economy, society and environment interrelate to shape the quality of life for its residents, workers, visitors and future generations. Sustainability requires each of these three systems to function harmoniously. Consequently, the concept of sustainability is an integral component of the new plan.

Through the "Sustainable Meadowlands" initiative, the NJMC will develop a framework to track the sustainability of the District. By paralleling other sustainability initiatives, the framework will include a set of indicators connected to issues identified in the Master Plan. Sustainable Meadowlands reinforces the NJMC's dual commitment to serve as trustee of the natural resources of the Meadowlands District and to foster a sustainable regional economy. The District will meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Planning can produce the most favorable results through a comprehensive assessment of the Meadowlands District. Coordination of planning and corresponding implementation strategies shall take place among the NJMC and its constituent municipalities. Compatible land uses that cross municipal borders and shared services shall be pursued where feasible. Also, the NJMC must continue to forge effective partnerships with environmental representatives, commerce, industry, and other public interest entities.

Planning strategies must permit sufficient flexibility to allow for inevitable rapid changes, with particular attention to technological changes. Scientific methodologies must be used to devise better means of data collection to measure our progress in achieving environmental protection, restoration, and remediation.

## **GOALS**

The NJMC has set these goals as a general framework for the Master Plan:

- To preserve and enhance wetlands and other valuable natural resources, open space, energy resources, and the historical heritage of the Meadowlands District;
- To promote a suitable array of land uses which encourage economic vitality with job creation and support the public health, safety, and general welfare;
- To prevent urban sprawl and degradation of the environment through improper use of land;
- To cultivate a strong sense of place in a desirable visual environment through creative development and design techniques;
- To foster the availability of various efficient transportation choices with emphasis on mass transit and the improvement of existing transportation facilities;
- To encourage the development of a balanced mix of housing types and costs within the limits of available infrastructure and community facilities of the District's municipalities; and
- To strengthen communication and coordination among the various public and private stakeholders shaping land use.

# A Vision for the Meadowlands District

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## PLAN FEATURES

The Master Plan incorporates a number of features that contribute to a unique and dynamic planning document. These features are categorized by the concepts on which the plan is based, its form, the collaborations necessary to prepare and implement the plan, and its intended outcomes:

### Concepts

- **Vision statement and goals.** The vision statement and goals presented in the last two sections emphasize the aspirations of the District. They are dynamic, unlimited by conditions that exist in the District.
- **Smart growth principles.** The Master Plan is a guide to achieving a unique sense of place for the District
- **Sustainable course of action.** The plan values the long-term sustainability of the District over short-term, isolated actions.
- **Fair and just treatment of citizens.**
  1. The Master Plan promotes environmental justice. No population, regardless of race, color, income or national origin, should bear a disproportionate amount of adverse health and environmental effects.
  2. All populations should share in the benefits of implementing the plan.
  3. The physical design of the District should support the public's access to information, services, jobs, and housing opportunities.

### Form

- **Integrated.** Traditional comprehensive plans generally consist of separate plans to address individual planning topics, such as land use and transportation. The NJMC Master Plan instead presents a series of planning strategies designed to reinforce each other in an integrated plan.
- **Acknowledges social and economic inter-relationships with the physical environment.** Although the plan places the traditional emphasis upon the physical environment, it does not neglect social and economic factors.
- **Based on District's physical or functional features.** The plan is organized around strategies for specific planning areas and functional systems, such as the natural environment, transportation, and economic development.



### Collaborative Effort

- **Reflects stakeholder engagement.** Collaboration among citizens, other governmental entities at all levels, nonprofit agencies, private developers, and other stakeholders is essential to successful plan development and implementation.
- **Seeks consistency with pertinent plans.** The plan makes comparisons between the NJMC Master Plan and the pertinent planning documents of the District's constituent municipalities, Bergen and Hudson counties, and other entities. It seeks to resolve any incompatibilities identified.
- **Coordinates with available programs and financial resources** that support its vision and planning strategies.

### Outcomes

- **Achievable set of strategies.** While vision-driven, the plan's strategies present a realistic, achievable course of actions for a ten-year planning horizon. The plan's impacts will endure beyond that point to the benefit of future generations.
- **Guidance.** The plan communicates NJMC policy in a manner that can be used by the Commission, its constituent municipalities, developers, citizens, and other entities with interests in the District.
- **Regulatory provisions.** The plan's policies and principles will be effectuated through the NJMC's regulations, codified at N.J.A.C. 19:3-1.1 *et seq.*
- **Environmental education and awareness.** The NJMC will build upon the successes of its educational programs and facilities. Tools include additional programs for school-age children and the general public, promoting the public's role in environmental stewardship, research through the Meadowlands Environmental Research Institute and other higher educational institutions, and sharing results of long-term monitoring for indicators of sustainability.
- **Monitoring process.** The plan describes a process that will ensure strategies are implemented and assess their impacts. The monitoring process will incorporate selected indicators of sustainability.
- **Revision mechanism.** A mechanism for periodic revision will give the plan the necessary flexibility to evolve in the face of changing conditions, attitudes, and monitoring outcomes.

## **A Vision for the Meadowlands District**

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